Tape-~~PLACE~~ NO. 19

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NARRATOR Martha Mott Brand ~~Erickse~~

INTERVIEWER Phyllis Lotz

PLACE "Elverhoy"Solvang

DATE ~~June~~ Jan. 1980

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Interview with Martha Mott Brandt-Ericksen
Date of Interview: 20 January 1980, 'Elverhoy', Solvang
Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz
Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz
Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Your home "Elverhoy' is being donated to the Santa Ynez Valley Historical Society, so my question is how do you want this announced in the newspaper?

Mrs. B.: I don't think it should be any great thing, just the actual statement that I am giving it to the Society whenever I move out, as simple as that.

PL: Are there any hopes you might have for its future as a Museum?

Mrs. B. We centainly talked that all out at our meetings, so we know the general ideas. There is one thing, that all my children are very pleased about it. I think you will be getting back a few things from them for the Museum.

PL: Dick(Christensen) mentioned that the living room is so large and beautiful that possibly there could be musicals and art shows there?

Mrs. B.: Yes, we have had musical, lectures and art shows, but those are in the studio, as the students are working there. The living room has very good acoustics for small musicals. Chamber Music or piano. My daughter has given alot of harpsichord concerts here and have been very successful in raising money for Garden House, so you could raise money for the Historical Society.

PL: What about the studio and its future?

Mrs. B.: I think that should be the main gallery and I think it could be adjusted very easily for paintings and sculpture. I visualize large sculpture down the middle and small pieces on the sides and the walls for paintings, and them I thought if you wanted to go further the small bedrooms would make very good small galeries but rotate the exhibits particularly Valley artists and there is a apartment upstairs which would be fine for a caretaker. If you didn't have a full time person I suppose an alarm system could be installed.

PL: Could we go back alittle bit and talk about the history of the house? When did you and your husband first come to the Santa Ynez Valley?

Mrs. B.: We came in 1949, we bought land and started(the house) the same year, a November weekend. We actually got here in October so we could put the kids in school. We rented a house in Ballard and we bot this piece of property and started to build in Nov. 1949. We knew nothing about California when we came. We did not know Solvang existed at first. We knew of the Santa Ynez Valley because we had friends who belonged to the Rancheros. They brought pictures back east that we saw but they never mentioned Solvang or the Danish Community which is funny because Viggo was Danish and they knew it. I think those Rancheros came up to Santa Barbara and they came into the Mission and that was all they saw of the Valley. They were from Massachusetts. The pictures were so beautiful and I wanted to come right away however we got trapped in Los Angeles by my sister who was living there and she said we would like Southern California so much better. So we went through parts of Southern California and looked and did not like it, well, we liked it but saw too many real estate signs.

PL: Did you come west for your health?

Mrs. B.: No, we came because Viggo always wanted to come to California and there was no reason not to. Previously his second wife did not want to come so that was the thing that kept hime from coming. It did not matter to me whether we stayed or came to California just as long as we were together, and if that was what he wanted to do that was alright with me.

PL: How many acres of land did you buy?

Mrs. B.: Six acres and it was all the way to Alisal Road, and all the way across the canyon to Axel Elbeck's place. We kept 3 and sold the rest in lots and then we had $500 after we had finished selling off the lots and still had 3 acres. Everyone thought we were awfully rich, a bunch of rich cranks from the East who wanted to build a house.

We only built the house because we could not find a place already built that we could possibly afford. So we did it ourselves and it took four years.

PL: Did the boys help?

Mrs. B.: David was only two so he wasn't much help but I have pictures of him hauling 2 by 4's. They all did. Viggo did practically every bit of the construction. The painting is what came under our juristiction. We painted beams and ceilings and windows and the kitchen.

PL: How did you come about with this particular floorplan?

Mrs. B.: We drew it up together. I think Viggo made the first original plan and then I went over it with him and we made alterations. I think I would still make alterations if I was doing it today, but it came out pretty well. And then we started the studio, because Viggo always put off making his own place of work. Whenever he moved from one place to another he left that to the end. This time we will do that first. We could all live in the studio while the house was being built. However we did find a very nice house in Ballard and stayed there while building. At that time rents were not what they are now. We came in each day doing a little more and then going back to Ballard and the children were in school. Thor went to Ballard, Jean was in high school and David was still too young for school. Thor went only one year to Ballard and then transferred to Solvang. Hean was here less then the others, she went to college so soon. She doen't have as much sentiment(for the house) as the boys do. Thor is the one with the sentimental feeling for Solvang. He is now on the board(for Elverhoy) and he should be. He will remember things best and could tell you more about the kiln, more that I could tell you, I mean whats left of it there, where that pile of wood there(out back) that was once the kiln. There is a little bit of brick work there, alot of the bricks went to Midland School when they were building a kiln.

PL: You never used the kiln after Mr. Brandt-Ericksen died?

Mrs. B.: No, he never finished it. He wanted it but he did not

live that long. He was going to finish it. One interesting thing about the kiln was that he always had them too small for what ever he made. If he made one to take a 4 ft. figure he made the kiln too small. I told him he would have to make it with a flexible top so that it would go yp and down so he could enlarge it fi he needed to, but of course it never got that far.

PL: When did Mr. Brandt-Ericksen Die?

Mrs. B.: He had cancer of the lung and of course that could have been quite far back before it was detected. By the time it was detected it was too late to do anything. We took him to Albuquerque and he had colbalt treatment which was then very new and I think the only other colbalt bomb was up in Canada. This one was at Lovelace Clinic in Albuquerque. He was treated there, it did hlpe as it made him feel better, the treatment was terrible but it did relieve the pain.

PL: He died in Solvang?

Mrs. B.: Yes, he died in this house, he never saw it the way it is. because I have done alot since. This wall, there was a terrace with an overhang. Now it is built up and we were going to do that and it would have been done alot differently if Viggo had been alive. And that(pointing) was to have a curved roof instead of straight. I compromised here by making the terrace look like it curved.
There was an article by Grace Davison about this house, written when we were building, that might have alot of information.

Viggo started the plays in Atterdag Bowl

PL: Is that where the plays began, down in the Atterdag Bowl?

Mrs. B.: Yes, they have done better lately. They put on Snow Queen and this year we are going to put on The Little Mermaid. Taken from HansChristian Andersen's stories. This fellow who lives in Santa Barbara and a friend of his will put it on. We can't touch the theater(Solvang Festival Theater) it is all wrapped up with Donovan Marley. Nobody can do a thing with the theater. But we will use the Parish Hall.

I have written a book on Viggo's life and also have recently added my own which I had not intended to do at all but people kept telling me I should put it in. I have asked various people about it in order to be published but they tell me that is more like a memoir not enough to make a book. I could make a book or leave it as it is now. I thought perhaps the Museum could print the memoirs and incidently your would like to know that Thor is taking ceramics so he can fire those little birds, the small piece so they can be for sale.

PL: Back to the reason of my visit today, when do you think the announcement of the gift of 'Elverhoy" to the Historical Society should be made?

Mrs. B.: As far as I'm concerned as soon as possible, I hate to keep quiet and then I think I have to keep quiet. There is something I think should not be made public at this time and that is that I am going to make a trust of $15,000 so that when they take over the building they get the trust, thats because you will need money to start. Dick said there was a meeting on the 19th of June and he would bring me to that meeting so if anyone has questions they can ask me.
Another thing we did not talk about, this is a beautiful place(the garden). There are very few places in Solvang where people can go to sit down and be outside. It is an attraction in itself. I was thinking if I could be asking the Society first before I do anthing. I will only move out when I can not maintain myself. I am 75 years old, at least I will be in Nov. 28th.

PL: Do you have a blueprint of the house?

Mrs. B.: No, we never made one, nothing like that. I would be pretty hard to show yoy. Viggo did it all, made the footage which did not mean a thing to me. When we got the uprights on I thought, Oh my goodness!, we can never build this, it is too tremendious! I did not say anthing because I did not want Viggo to think I did not have any faith in him. I told him years later how I felt when the uprights went up and he said to tell the truth, I did not

think I could do it either! It sort of grew from a plan and we found that the ground was not level, it slopes this way so that is why the house is stepped up. The Studio is lower than the living room, the living room is lower then the kitchen. Homes later did these things.

PL: Tell me about the cork floors?

Mrs. B.: They are Danish Cork and originally came from Denmark, but we bought them out here. They can not be replaced, I don't think they could be anyway. In a few spots I have replaced with Armstrong Tiles and that looks alright. The origional floor cork is natural cork and like the floors I had in my studio on Cape Cod. I like it very much, I wash it to clean it, I use Spick and Span on the floors in the kitchen, no rinsing is needed. On the woodwork I use Liquid Gold.

PL: Tell me about the wooden front door?

Mrs. B.: It is just a big piece of redwood. It is pieced together solid. This was the kind of work that Viggo did when it rained and he could not work on the house. It did not take him very long to make the door, about a week. He had tools that are electric for the woodworking. So that made it very fast.

PL: Thank you very much for this interview, Mrs. Brandt-Ericksen